

don't write *that* book!

Episode 22:

How to Get Compelling Stories

Mike Michalowicz ([00:01](#)):

Welcome back to the Don't Write That Book podcast where you can learn how to write your bestseller and own your authorship. Follow along with us as we give you an insider's view of the book industry. Now, here are your hosts. Myself, Mike Michalowicz and AJ Harper.

Mike Michalowicz ([00:16](#)):

Today is going to be a compelling episode because we're going to talk about compelling stories, how to conduct interviews, to get those stories that really move your book along at a whole new level and engage readers at a whole new level. I'm joining studio with AJ Harper, who is a snow warrior. Apparently, we're talking off air about this.

AJ Harper ([00:37](#)):

No, this, this, this. It's eight inches is not a lot. (Wow.) Does, you don't have to be a warrior if there's eight inches of snow.

Mike Michalowicz ([00:43](#)):

When, when does it become a warrior?

AJ Harper ([00:45](#)):

Listen to me. Google: Halloween snowstorm, 1991. (Okay.) I was in that snowstorm. It was so epic. People still talk about it. <Laugh>. I could not find my car. And I finally decided to let them tow it so I could find it. And I figured that way I could just pick it up at the end.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:09](#)):

<Laugh>. That's brilliant.

AJ Harper ([01:10](#)):

It was so, I don't even remember what the, my fellow Minnesotans, I'm sorry. I don't remember what the, how many feet it was. It is legend. I was having a dinner party that night. Yeah, I still had it.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:23](#)):

Oh my. Are you kidding me?

AJ Harper ([01:25](#)):

I still had it. I'm trudging home in the early part of the storm because I, I was walking a few blocks from the store and then <laugh>. But not only did I have it, I wasn't alone. My guest came.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:40](#)):

<Laugh>. Oh my gosh. You Minnesotans.

AJ Harper ([01:42](#)):

We are hardcore. So when I, when you say snow warrior, when we have a little measly eight inches. Yeah. It's like, just get over yourself.

Mike Michalowicz ([01:49](#)):

I, I think I just heard how you differentiate snow. It's inches versus feet. You said. It's like, you know, if it's eight feet, that's a big deal, I guess to you.

AJ Harper ([01:56](#)):

That, that Okay. That's, that's something to talk about <laugh>. That you've got to, you got to get up there and get the snow off the roof when that happens.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:03](#)):

That's so funny. Well, I consider you snow warrior.

AJ Harper ([02:06](#)):

Okay. I'll take it. There you go. And you're Mike Michalowicz, author of 10 books. 11.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:13](#)):

Well, right.

AJ Harper ([02:14](#)):

Right. Ten with me. One children's book. That's right. *My Money Bunnies*. Yeah. Yeah. And on a mission to eradicate entrepreneurial poverty.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:25](#)):

Yes.

AJ Harper ([02:25](#)):

Through your books. Yes.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:27](#)):

Yes. Thank you. And your book.

AJ Harper ([02:29](#)):

And, and probably you have a snowblower and not just a shovel.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:33](#)):

Yeah. We have a plow.

AJ Harper ([02:35](#)):

You have a plow.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:35](#)):

We have a plow for, for our eight inches.

AJ Harper ([02:38](#)):

No comment.

Mike Michalowicz ([02:38](#)):

My snow warrior friend here has written the most important book you can read. If you're listening to this show. The one book to read is write a must read. It is a must read, and you will produce something of such higher quality as a result. It is, I can't remember who I was talking with, AJ, but they just brought up this book, your book specifically, and said, "This is the best book in the space." Now we both knew you. He knew you and he's like, he knew that we worked together and, but he just voiced to this group. He's like, this is the best book in the space.

AJ Harper ([03:08](#)):

And you can't remember? <laugh>

Mike Michalowicz ([03:09](#)):

No. And, and, and shamefully it was like a week ago.

AJ Harper ([03:12](#)):

Okay.

Mike Michalowicz ([03:13](#)):

So.

AJ Harper ([03:14](#)):

That's just because we're both Gen X and things leave our brains.

Mike Michalowicz ([03:18](#)):

Yeah. Okay. So let's dig into the content for today. We're going to talk about writing or producing compelling stories through interviews. And we've done quite a few together. You've done quite a few independently of me. I'm just curious of why it's important.

AJ Harper ([03:34](#)):

So many reasons. And I remember for your first book, *Toilet Paper Entrepreneur*, we didn't do interviews.

Mike Michalowicz ([03:41](#)):

Right.

AJ Harper ([03:42](#)):

But that had been something I had been doing for a long time. So I was really excited when you were game for *The Pumpkin Plan*. I think you got hooked. We used to do them together then. We still do them together now. But now you also will do some on your own. But at the time, I think you might've had my, I don't know, have to see why you, if you remember this at all. I think you weren't totally convinced of what do you do in an interview and why does it matter and why... You know, sometimes I think people are just focused on their own content and also their own recollection of events. And don't really see the true impact of interviewing to get the content. But I think you're, you've been won over a long time ago.

Mike Michalowicz ([04:24](#)):

Oh, for sure. I find it makes a much richer story. It gives you perspectives that you didn't have yourself. But also there's also, there's an educational process. I learned so much during these interviews from people we've created better concepts when we were writing all in the workshop component, which I think is what's being received is such a powerful tool. So the idea is don't do interviews, do workshops. And a workshop is someone isn't being considered for an interview. They are pursuing the educational opportunity. You're, you're educating people. And the reason is, top performers want to improve themselves.

AJ Harper ([05:02](#)):

So, but just to be clear, you're talking about interviews for a job versus interviews to write stories you're talking about.

Mike Michalowicz ([05:07](#)):

Yeah. Now I'm talking about interviews for a job, but are... Yeah. Thanks for that clarity. So for all in, we're talking about this process of running these workshops where you can find people that ultimately you could hire. And during an interview, one person said, oh, I know the ultimate shortcut and this is what I'm doing. Because I'm not running a workshop, I'm just going to existing ones. I need to hire a bookkeeper. I'm going to a bookkeeper education course to observe the other students.

AJ Harper ([05:29](#)):

So we got this good idea.

Mike Michalowicz ([05:31](#)):

Yeah, it's like, oh my God, this is such a good idea. And that came out of an interview.

AJ Harper ([05:33](#)):

Yeah. So when you interview people to get content, you always want to get ideas For sure. But I think the primary reason to interview is to get better stories. Yes. So you can get social proof that way. So you telling people, I think this is the way it should work. Here's the evidence from my own life or my own business is helpful. But when you also add in other people that shows proof of concept. Yeah. Even if they were not necessarily learning from you to begin with. That's right. And that reminds me of John Shaw. So that's oldie, but goodie.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:12](#)):

Yeah. So John Shaw, he owns Shaw Solar in Colorado. We were writing *The Pumpkin Plan*. Yeah. And now I can't even remember the story. There's so many going through it.

AJ Harper ([06:23](#)):

I remember it. I still think about it.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:25](#)):

Okay. Then give me the details.

AJ Harper ([06:27](#)):

Because every time I see solar panels, I think of John Shaw. <laugh> So he talked about how he went about using the credits that you can get for solar to build his, you know, get client base and sort of how that played into his top client. Like the top the top. So for everybody, give everybody the essence of *Pumpkin Plan*, just for context.

Mike Michalowicz ([06:56](#)):

Yeah. So the essence is not all clients are built the same. That you have what we call top clients, and you want to identify what they are and then specialize in catering to their needs. It's, it's an application at the Prato principle.

AJ Harper ([07:08](#)):

Yeah. So what I loved about that interviews, we learned that he was actually doing what we were suggesting on his own, not because he learned it from you. So a story where somebody is using the same methodology or something similar, they might call it something else, is still proof of concept. So at the time, you had a lot of proof of concept from your own businesses. And so that just added another layer by going out and getting another business that, you know, wasn't, wasn't one of yours.

Mike Michalowicz ([07:38](#)):

And what's nice about taking in this external story that does not have, or is not applying what you've taught them, they're just doing their own shows that the concept works in the wild, in the wild independently. That there's proof, there's history. I remember the Velcro story. You've heard this a million times. How Velcro was invented was bio-mimicry. Dude walks his dog through the woods, there's a bird stuck to his dog. He investigates the burrs, like, my gosh, has little hooks on it, designed by nature. Took and deferred. I'm going to emulate this. And to me this is very similar, is when you come up with a concept, maybe your concept is Velcro, but when you can point to nature's also doing this, it just brings more credibility, more perspective on that concept.

AJ Harper ([08:18](#)):

Yeah. And the, you know, like you said earlier, the, the content is we're both having a little coffee.

Mike Michalowicz ([08:24](#)):

I know. It's, yeah. Is it the dry air Dry? I think it's dry.

AJ Harper ([08:25](#)):

Dry. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. So the, you create more compelling content when you actually interview. Now you've got quotes, you've got new insights. Hopefully you can also paint a bigger picture. So even if there's a story that exists somewhere, maybe you heard it in the news, and then you go get your own version of it by interviewing key people in that, in that story, now you have a more compelling version. You get to set the scene, you get to ask, 'How did you feel? What were you thinking? What were the stakes? What, you know, what do you remember about this? Where did this come from?' And now you have a story no one else has. That's another piece which is exclusive content. You have your own version of it. And a good example of that would be, and we have so many of those. There's so many. But a good example of that would be the Baltimore Museum. Also an *All In* story.

Mike Michalowicz ([09:15](#)):

Yes. That was great. And that was a discovery by you. And then I pursued them aggressively. So I, I found the background of this is I found a story and I wanted to show, well, I wanted to show when an employee's not treated well or managed by a great leader, what happens? And there was this guy, Aleksandr Vasiliev, in Russia, who was a, was a, a guard in the museum at the Boris Yeltsin Museum. And I shared the story.

AJ Harper ([09:43](#)):

We've talked about him before on the podcast.

Mike Michalowicz ([09:44](#)):

Oh. We, we have, I shared the story with you and, and you found the counter story. How'd you find that story in the first place?

AJ Harper ([09:50](#)):

I was just watching the Today Show.

Mike Michalowicz ([09:52](#)):

And they talked about it.

AJ Harper ([09:53](#)):

Right. But because we were working on *All In*, I was in, I always say, "Keep your book top of mind." So you're working on it a little bit every day. Otherwise things like something you see on the Today Show or someone tells you in passing, you won't connect the dots. But because I was working on the book, I connect and 'Oh!' Instantly that's the counter story. I was able to grab that.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:16](#)):

Yeah. And you gave me a call and you said, Hey, I, I got these folks. And you said, see if you can get them. But I think what's interesting about the story is there was enough content already circulating that we could have kind of stitched something together.

AJ Harper ([10:29](#)):

Yeah. It was a few articles.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:30](#)):

But there's something remarkable when you actually get the interview. You get these insights. So we called them up. It was back and forth, back and forth, but we got the someone from the board of directors, I think, the lead curator, I can't remember.

AJ Harper ([10:42](#)):

The person who came up with the idea. She was on the board. (Yeah.) And then somebody who was on staff, forgive us. Two, two lovely women who gave us their time.

Mike Michalowicz ([10:53](#)):

Yeah. But the story was amazing. And then their perspective was interesting. What I thought they were going to say is, because of this, the engagement of employees is better. Like, people are staying longer and they're performing better. And there are indicators to that. But the aha to me was two people left to become curators. So the, the backstory is these are guards. They say, we want to make this exhibit guarding the art. You're going to experience what it's like to be a curator, and you're going to be the curators for this exhibit. Two of those guards no longer, well one actually works there as a curator, and another one moved on to another museum as a curator. So these people got elevated. And that, to me, that was a surprising story.

AJ Harper ([11:33](#)):

Yeah, that's a good point. You, you, you find out. So if we had just, we could have told the story just from articles, you know, re putting our own spin on things, collecting little data here and there. Obviously you cannot plagiarize, but you can cite sources and so forth and kind of piece it together. But our conclusion would've been wrong. So that's another thing is you go to the source and maybe they have another view of it. And now you're the one that's presenting that. Also, I will point out, we didn't just get one story out of that. We carried that forward. So it's in the introduction and then it's in a later chapter, a follow up for a different point. Because if you get a good story, you could have it in multiple chapters. And that's gold.

Mike Michalowicz ([12:18](#)):

Why is it gold?

AJ Harper ([12:19](#)):

Because readers love when you revisit, like, it's almost like characters. Oh yeah. That guy. You know? Yeah. They like that callback. Yeah. It's familiar to them. They recognize it. And when we recognize things, we enjoy them. Yes. So it's just, they, they love to have if it's a good story, they want to hear more about it.

Mike Michalowicz ([12:44](#)):

It's interesting, the two stories, and I think both have those callbacks, if I recall correctly. Now with all in that I hear most often is Baltimore Museum and the Texas smokehouse.

AJ Harper ([12:55](#)):

And that's an interesting example of you conducted a bunch of interviews without me. And we, this Happens, we used to, and only a little bit. (Yeah.) But initially you had said it's, we're going to build the whole book around this one place.

Mike Michalowicz ([13:14](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([13:15](#)):

And then it evolved. And that happens. So sometimes you have stories that you just don't end up using.

Mike Michalowicz ([13:21](#)):

And there's, there's still value in that too. Because A, you never know what stories, the story that's going to play out the best until you get all those interviews through and done. Secondly, is thanks to the modern era, you can repurpose those. So we, as a bonus, when we sold *All In*, we said to get, see all the interviews, these backstories, so you can learn and discover interviews that didn't play out in the book.

AJ Harper ([13:44](#)):

I think that's one of the main benefits is you can use, as long as you record them and get permission, you can use the full interviews for bonus content. You could also, even if you don't hand them out, you can pull other points or moments from those stories and use them to create articles or columns or other bits to promote your book. Because we often have to create a lot of content around the launch and ongoing. So you can use it for that purpose. But also I think interviewing builds relationships.

Mike Michalowicz ([14:14](#)):

It does.

AJ Harper ([14:15](#)):

So, you know, for example, I wanted to build a relationship with Steve Pressfield, my hero. And I'd I, I don't, I mean his book, *The War of Art* saved my life. I talk about it all the time. Saved my writing life, which is no small thing for me. It's like saving my life.

Mike Michalowicz ([14:32](#)):

Yeah, yeah. That is your life.

AJ Harper ([14:33](#)):

And I really legitimately wanted to interview him about this. Something I had learned from him at a speaking event he did in Nashville. And I reached out to interview him to get clarity on something he had said in that room that day. But it was because of that interview that I had a connection with him and could later then ask him for an endorsement. And, which he gave me. I'm so thrilled. I should have a tattooed on me. Honestly. It's that important to me.

Mike Michalowicz ([15:03](#)):

<Laugh>. Yeah. Yeah. No, I remember you going down there meeting with him.

AJ Harper ([15:06](#)):

Well, no I didn't. No. I went down in Nashville to see and speak.

Mike Michalowicz ([15:10](#)):

And you met him.

AJ Harper ([15:11](#)):

I did meet him. You're the one that made me go up and get my picture taken with him. (Yeah. Yeah.) You texted me. . I wrote about that in my book. (I'm proud of that.) I wouldn't have done that. (I'm proud of that.) I would've just kept walking. But I actually didn't have a conversation with him over Zoom for my book to get clarity on something. So that begins a relationship. And those relationships can blossom into friendships. I know they have for you.

Mike Michalowicz ([15:35](#))

Anthony Sari, we were talking about him off the air earlier, is a client and friend. And we interviewed him and his business. He coincidentally, he is also like John Shaw in the solar space. Anthony Sari owns New York Solar. And we were writing *Get Different*, what's nice is I had an established relationship with Anthony already. And I was talking about this book and what we're doing, and I was teaching or sharing some of the principles about getting different. And he said, 'Well, I have this radio spot. I bought these, you know, 10 radio spots I already pre-bought.' And he goes, 'I don't know what he's going to do is it's going to do a standard radio thing. But now you're talking about *Get Different*, is there something we can do here?' I said, yeah, it is either the medium or the method. So we know the medium. It's radio.

Mike Michalowicz ([16:19](#)):

So that's done. Let's do it in a strange or unique, I shouldn't say strange, a different method. And we made an ad that was nothing like any other ad. So the first thing we did is we said, well, what ad they play? And it's this cheesy, cheery music and so forth. I taught him the process and he had to sit in his closet where he was recording into the microphone like we're doing. And over a hundred times. I made him do this over and over. He was so attuned to cheesy radio voice, 'Hi, this is Anthony of Solar Anthony, and please call me to do business with me.' Like that was his thing, <laugh> I'm like, dude, it's got to be like you're talking to one person and it's got to be your rage against the solar industry because he, he's frustrated having people get taken advantage of.

Mike Michalowicz ([17:01](#)):

Then when he called the radio station to say, here's my ad, they said, well, you got to put music over it. He said, no, I, I want, we created an ad that was him like leaving a voice message for one person. And the radio station was, they said, but no one does this. You can't do this. The, the radio station fought back with music clipping. We said, no, no, no. Finally he said, okay. They said, this is the worst ad ever. It produced more leads for him than he's ever gotten through radio. But by far, and he still continues to do it today.

AJ Harper ([17:30](#)):

Okay. But you just shared details that came from the interview.

Mike Michalowicz ([17:34](#)):

That's right. All that came from the interview.

AJ Harper ([17:35](#)):

Like one of the most important parts of that was him sitting in a closet. And he was more, more of that is that he was really distressed. (Yeah.) He could not, he didn't like, like the sound of his voice. He didn't, he didn't think he sounded good. He started to lose faith in it. He was, I mean, imagine a person sitting in a closet really feeling like this, I, 'I'm terrible at this. This is not going to work.' We were able to get that visual in the story from the conversation. So if you had recounted the story to me, let me tell you about Anthony. It wouldn't have had the same depth because why was it important? In *Get Different*. The main barrier for readers is a fear of being different

Mike Michalowicz ([18:22](#)):

<Laugh> Right.

AJ Harper ([18:23](#)):

And so it was the perfect story. Initially. We did it because we wanted some a good story that went through the process so we could use a story. That's, that's helpful by the way. If you can get a person who knows your process and follows it to walk through what it was like to do the process, that's fantastic. You can explain to readers, yes, here's my process. 1, 2, 3, 4. But if you can also get a story where a person shares how they applied it, that's amazing. Because it helps with reading comprehension, social proof, and addresses some of the pitfalls. What we didn't, I didn't expect, was to have Anthony talk about how emotional that was for him and how challenging that was for him, which actually mirrored reader experience and became a massive opportunity. And that story is actually on, I mean, it's pretty rare for us to have a story that goes on for two or three pages. And his does. And, and the benefit of that story was you, we got to put you in it in a natural way. So I think I see a lot of people, they do these interviews, they tell the story, and if that person is acquainted with them, meaning client student, someone who's, who they're basically talking about using the knowledge that the author is providing the author takes themselves out.

Mike Michalowicz ([19:49](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([19:49](#)):

But it's the most natural organic way for you to include yourself as an expert in the story by sharing the joint experience. (Yeah.) Right. And so that and that, that story was just had so many bonus benefits.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:04](#)):

I was so rich. Yeah. And the 'aha' came as we started to deliver services around *Get Different*, was that you have to do it until you don't want to do it. And that's usually when you have a breakthrough of, of doing the same. So Anthony, I think it was a hundred takes. He did. And by number 75, he's like, I, I can't do it anymore. I'm going crazy. And that's when he started having breakthroughs. It was finally natural. It was all that artificial boxed radio voice that he couldn't help but doing. And it just pointed out the need to be persistent till you have a breakthrough.

AJ Harper ([20:39](#)):

But we wouldn't have had any of that-- (Wouldn't have had any of it.) --if you had just given me some bullet points on that story. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([20:45](#)):

Where do people get the bad interviews? Because they, I, I remember one, I'm, I don't the guy's name. It was so bad. Within seconds, I could feel your eyes roll because my eyes were rolling too. And they kind of banged each other.

AJ Harper ([20:57](#)):

But that's because you know me, I was, I was, I had my game face.

Mike Michalowicz ([21:00](#)):

Oh, it, well, I, my eyes were rolling. Some dude came on, I think it was for *Get Different*. And we wanted to understand the mechanics of the mind. And it became a lecture, but a salesy lecture <laugh>, the guy's like, oh, yeah.

AJ Harper ([21:14](#)):

Didn't stop. Well actually what's happened with interviews for you is, is a challenge. It can be the case if you're a person who's a notable expert, maybe you're on your multiple books. People know you sometimes it's hard to get a good interview now because people are promoting themselves. So.

Mike Michalowicz ([21:32](#)):

They want to be all over that book.

AJ Harper ([21:32](#)):

We did in the last six months, a bunch of, I would call discovery interviews, which I think you can also do when you're trying to decide. Is there, there they're with my book. Let me just see. We put a book on the back burner because we were coming up empty with several interviews.

Mike Michalowicz ([21:50](#)):

Yep.

AJ Harper ([21:51](#)):

Honestly, what they all had in common was every single person was pitching you.

Mike Michalowicz ([21:56](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([21:57](#)):

And that is something that's sort of a, you know, a negative aspect of your notoriety at this point.

Mike Michalowicz ([22:04](#)):

How do you get, what if, what if you're Malcolm Gladwell, you know, and, and you're looking to do interviews, which he does them extensively and they're amazing. How does a guy of that, that credential that recognized?

AJ Harper ([22:15](#)):

Well, he's a different type of author than you are though. So I don't think, I mean, maybe he's still, maybe he still has people pitch him, but he probably weeds them out because they're, he's not in any way. He doesn't have programs or services or. Yeah. So I don't, I mean, it's, no one's going to go on a joint venture pitched with him. Or they might try. I guess people do try. They would be silly to try. So, but I mean, someone like you or say Don Miller or Hal Elrod or any of you know.

Mike Michalowicz ([22:47](#)):

Yeah. Much more pitchy because they're like, 'Oh, what's the product?'

AJ Harper ([22:49](#)):

Dorie Clark. Like, they're just going to say, you know, how can we, they think they're being interviewed and it's a promotion. And I, I think this is really important. That's never what the interview is. And I, I, I think maybe people have wrong information about why we do interviews. It's not to promote other people, but if you're doing interviews and that's what you think, or if you're treating, say, oh, I'll put you in my book, I'll put you in my book. That's, but yet there's no value to the readers. This is disservice. Now you're, again, you're, 'Don't write that book.'

Mike Michalowicz ([23:30](#)):

Exactly. Don't do that interview.

AJ Harper ([23:31](#)):

The function is how can you get more value for your readers, whether it's entertainment value, emotional value, where they feel more seen and heard, or new insights. That's the purpose of it. And I think people come expecting that they're going to have their program touted in the book. And unfortunately we've been running into that a lot lately.

Mike Michalowicz ([23:55](#)):

A rookie mistake I made, too, is interviewing people who have notoriety who I think could help promote the book. And because they're included would want to. And we've included some stories of people of that stature. I don't know what the right term is, but, but they've never promoted the books. And so it's a mistake to get someone just because they could promote the book. It's got to be a story that's fluid that compliments the book.

AJ Harper ([24:20](#)):

But on the other hand, people who almost no one would probably know who they are. If they're in the book, they will talk about it.

Mike Michalowicz ([24:27](#)):

That's the greatest irony.

AJ Harper ([24:27](#)):

Right. Like Debbie Horowitz.

Mike Michalowicz ([24:29](#)):

Debbie Horowitz won Stop promoting the book. Yeah. Which we talked about. She's probably sold tens of thousands of books, first

AJ Harper ([24:33](#)):

Books. I don't know about that, but yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([24:34](#)):

No, she's, she talks about it constantly. Yeah.

AJ Harper ([24:36](#)):

So I do want to get back to what are the mistakes. Yeah. So the number one mistake that people make is they don't ask for the interview <laugh>. Yeah. people are nervous. Yeah. They're nervous to ask. I want to tell you, I have done more than a thousand. That is not an exaggeration in interviews specifically to get stories. So not just general interviews. (Right.) But the function of them was to pull stories. Not all of them are successful, but I've done them. And I've never had a person turn me down

Mike Michalowicz ([25:09](#)):

When asking them,

AJ Harper ([25:10](#)):

When asking,

Mike Michalowicz ([25:11](#)):

Regardless of what, well, you couldn't quote unquote, couldn't get President Obama.

AJ Harper ([25:16](#)):

Okay. Haven't I haven't tried. Well, I didn't try, so I'm still a thousand for a thousand. But mostly people like to talk about themselves.

Mike Michalowicz ([25:25](#)):

That's the essence of it.

AJ Harper ([25:25](#)):

The other thing is framing it in the right way, you know, letting people understand. It's a short time commitment, being really specific. So that leads to the, this is absolute biggest mistake besides not asking at all that people make with interviews, is they try to do a general interview on their topic. I'm writing a book about relationships. I'm writing a book about second marriages, and I'd love to get your thoughts on that. No, that's what, yeah. What is happening? How, what are we going to talk about? Yeah. Not interesting, not compelling. Might not have anything to do with them. They probably hear this all the time if they're a person of note. But also in the interviewee, if they're not a person of note who's used to doing interviews, it makes them nervous. Well, wait, what are you going to ask me?

AJ Harper ([26:21](#)):

Interviewees want to do a good job for you. So if they're nervous about that, this is going to go bad. And you're also not going to get any juicy content. So the solution is, and this is what I always do, and you and I do it, you need a specific teaching point from your book, and you need to match that up with the interviewee. A preferably one. It could be two or three, but no more, no more than that. So that when you reach out to them, you say, I specifically I'm writing on, 'I'm working on a book for this type of reader. And this is my main message. What I really want to talk to you about is this one point. I want to get your thoughts on this one teaching point.' So this is something that's, you know, one piece of your puzzle and you've thought about who's the best person for that.

AJ Harper ([27:16](#)):

When we sit down to outline, we'll always try and get your stories. What do you have stories for Mike? But then we'll go through, okay, who do we know? Who do we know? Who do we know? How can we get this? And if we don't know, we can go out into different communities and try and find the answer. But then when you get in that interview and you're specifically talking about that one thing, it's so rich, it's so interesting. And then, you know, you can get the story. You can't get the story from a general topic interview. You're, you're just, all you're going to be doing is chatting. You're just chatting.

Mike Michalowicz ([27:49](#)):

Patty Condon is a great example of this with *All In*, we wanted a story specifically around creating joy, happiness in their work environment. But someone that had measurable, someone that had a system to measure this. And so we come across Patty Condon, who has a joy formula. So we didn't talk about how do you recruit the best, retain the best? How do you elevate the, raise the bar? We said, 'How do you, how do you measure people's joy or happiness?'

AJ Harper ([28:14](#)):

Very specific. What's the metric?

Mike Michalowicz ([28:16](#)):

Yeah. And, and that interview probably went for an hour. And we, I dare say we even did a second interview. It went so deep on that subject. The other thing is, is really interesting stories come out of it. Not their generic, usual two or three that they tell the world. They tell you about specific stories. And he said, you know what's funny, Mike? He goes, I had, I'll never forget this. He goes, I had my sales manager who is supposed to get us more sales, come to me and out of frustration say, 'Why do we keep selling? Can't we just be happy? And he's like I've never shared that before.' <laugh>

AJ Harper ([28:49](#)):

And I'm like, what's that best? Whenever they say, 'Oh, I've never told anybody this.'

Mike Michalowicz ([28:52](#)):

Yeah. I'm like, wow, that's going in.

AJ Harper ([28:54](#)):

I remember I used to do this when I was a ghost writer. I would always lead the interviews with whoever. That's how I have chalked up so many of them. Yeah. And you know, sometimes it's just not there. Sometimes you're 30 minutes into a call and the person just can't access the story. Yeah. It's actually

hard for people to remember. They don't think a narrative. They don't think, wait, where was I? What was I doing? So you kind of have to coax them through it. There is an art form to pulling stories. But I remember, I, I was, was with a client and this person had a great story, kind of underdog come from behind or more like a 'Phoenix from the Ashes' type story. But she wasn't giving me anything. And it just, I kept saying, well, where were you when that happened? And how do you know that's true? These are some of my standard questions. I'll ask before and after, you know, well, before you realize this teaching point was true, what was, what was your life like? Okay. Now after what was, you know, I'm just trying to find help their— All you're doing is trying to help their brains access it. And I just wasn't getting anything. 30 minutes, 35 minutes, 40 minutes. And I'm about ready to give up. And then I asked the right question about when she was ready to give up.

AJ Harper ([30:13](#)):

(Interesting.) And she said, oh, and told me this story and I don't want to give away the details because then it would reveal who I was ghosting for. But very specific story about being in her place of business in the middle of the night and realizing it was going to close.

Mike Michalowicz ([30:30](#)):

Oh wow.

AJ Harper ([30:31](#)):

But it took me 40 minutes to get the story and it turned out to be an incredible emotional story. So, you know, if I, but however, if I had not had a specific goal for that call, we would've just been talking and my client and this person would've been agreeing with each other. It's a lot of agreeing with each other.

Mike Michalowicz ([30:54](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

AJ Harper ([30:54](#)):

Yeah. And I would've had nothing to write.

Mike Michalowicz ([30:56](#)):

Yeah. It feels like questions are keys. We got to keep on trying new keys to unlock somebody in certain cases.

AJ Harper ([31:02](#)):

Yeah. But the, it begins with the specificity where you're not talking about a general topic. And you know, I mentioned Steve Pressfield earlier. What I asked him and I genuinely wanted to know, was about the Epiphinal moment in Hero's Journey and his understanding of it, which he had told us at the event in Nashville that was worth the price of admission and blew my freaking mind. And I told everybody about it, but I wanted to understand more about it and where it came from. So I wrote in my approach to interview him, Hey, you said this. I want to know what it means. I'm working on a book. Can I just ask you this one question? Which then led to a longer interview, of course. But he was fascinated. She's like, wait, I said that <laugh>, he could.

Mike Michalowicz ([31:50](#)):

That's great.

AJ Harper ([31:51](#)):

He could, you know, because if you can get specific, so if you're listening to say a notable person on a podcast and they say something cool and you genuinely want to know more about it, you could say, I heard you say on this podcast X, Y, Z. And I'm just wondering, is this true? And could I just talk, get 10 minutes at your time to just get clarification? Most of the time they're going to say yes to something. Because now you're not saying, can I talk to you about, it's like if you were saying I'd like to interview you Brene Brown about vulnerability. Right. She'd be like, yeah, okay. I've got many books and podcasts. You can look at those things. (Yeah.) But if you were to say, there's this podcast I listened to, or I saw you give a lecture on X, Y, Z and you made this one obscure point and you've never talked about it again. And I would just really love to know what your thoughts are about that and why you believe that. And I'm writing a book and would you be, could you just get 10 minutes of my, your time? You are, maybe you wouldn't get her, but you are more likely to get her. Y

Mike Michalowicz ([32:48](#)):

Yeah. Well one of the challenges, and this may be Brene Brown's case, is there are gatekeepers in front of certain people that you want to interview. And then you have to figure out how to navigate through them. You have to have to arm those people. I presume that's what I've done. So the Baltimore Museum, ironically or interestingly had gatekeepers in front of them. I couldn't directly ask those people. I had to find out who they were because they're not specified in the stuff that we had. And I got directed to a media department and they're like, who is this? What do you want? And how to qualify? So I interviewed with them to be interviewing the people that they invited in. So you just have to be prepared for that. But the specificity was powerful. But also the credibility coming to them saying this is a book. If you're a historically an author, it helps to say I've produced other books you know, I'm not out of nowhere proof that this is a legitimate endeavor, not a backdoor way to get in. Some people are rich with ego. How do you hang up the phone on an interview quickly? We've had some of those where it's just like, this is just not the right fit. Bad move. (Yeah.) Someone's promoting themselves. Do just sit and smile for 45 minutes or is there a way...

AJ Harper ([33:57](#)):

No, let them finish their thought and say, oh you know what? We've got such great stuff right now. Let us sit on this and think about it. We'll get back to you if we have follow up questions. Yeah,

Mike Michalowicz ([34:09](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([34:09](#)):

That's it. Just, it's okay. You can just let them finish the thought. <Laugh>.

Mike Michalowicz ([34:13](#)):

And the good thing is we will have follow up questions for most people anyway. So those people may not qualify. But We'll a lot of people we interview, we say, you know, you're not going to hear anything for like six months.

AJ Harper ([34:23](#)):

And that's true. We'll say the same thing to people who might not be a good interview and people who are. So by the way, if you were interviewed by us, it doesn't, if you heard that, it doesn't mean it's just a nice thing to say as, and we often do have follow ups and sometimes people don't hear from us until the book's about to come out and we say, can you look at this story? Which is something you need to do. So, you know, one of the logistics around take doing these calls, I get this question from authors all the time in my workshop. 'Well, how do I get their permission? What do I do?' So here's what you do. Get the interview. I always say, ask for 20 minutes plan for an hour.

Mike Michalowicz ([34:59](#)):

So smart.

AJ Harper ([35:00](#)):

So don't tell them an hour. No one wants to give you an hour of their time, but if it runs over and they love talking to you, don't be the person who says you have to go. <laugh> (Right. Right.) So just plan the hour. Secondly, make sure you record it. It can be Zoom or phone. You can use free conference call.com or I don't... I don't know what it's called anymore. But there's all sorts of free Yep. Services. The reason I say sometimes it's phone is if you're writing a book that has sensitive topics, it's hard for people sometimes to look you in the eye. When they're telling you something really personal. So give them the option. That way they can choose to have the anonym relative anonymity of just being on the phone. And a lot of times, you know, I've done a lot of interviews with people who cry; hundreds, honestly. Where people cry. And I think it was easier because they were not looking at my face. Yeah. So we default to zoom, but we don't need to record and then immediately download the recording, get the transcript one.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:01](#)):

What do you, what do you use for a transcriber

AJ Harper ([36:03](#)):

Nowadays? Well, I'm using Temi right now, but I think there's a lot of stuff that's free that you can do. I think Zoom has its own transcript that's in it . So that one's easy. A lot of the conference call places also have built in, you know, I don't

Mike Michalowicz ([36:17](#)):

You have recordings or such.

AJ Harper ([36:18](#)):

I don't even know anymore because I don't do it that much with I, I'm always on Zoom now. Yeah.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:22](#)):

It seems to be more popular.

AJ Harper ([36:23](#)):

But the other thing that you and I do that's crucial, you won't remember the interview. So we debrief for sometimes right after. It's like three minutes, it's almost nothing. Yep. You'll say, this is what I thought was a value. I'll say, this is what I think. And then that's part of the recording so that we can see the

debrief and the transcript. But then you take it another level. You take notes throughout the call. Yep. So then when I go in and I might use the story writing later, I'll look at your notes and then I go to the transcript.

Mike Michalowicz ([36:56](#)):

Yeah. What I like about the debrief we do at the end is when I'm looking back in interview, I start in that last section because What do we think was relevant and important in the moment. And then I know what to look at. We also collected the very beginning, the person's contact information, spelling of their prop, their name properly. (Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>) I used to not do that. And then you're, I'm looking up after the fact. It's good to get them saying it, but it's also good to get them pronouncing it because when you do the audio version of the book.

AJ Harper ([37:21](#)):

Oh, smart!

Mike Michalowicz ([37:23](#)):

Yeah. So how do you pronounce your last name? I refer to it and it's happened now enough times that that's a valuable.

AJ Harper ([37:28](#)):

I love that. It is such a good tip.

Mike Michalowicz ([37:30](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. It's a valuable asset.

AJ Harper ([37:33](#)):

So I do want to say I want to tell you a funny little anecdote. When I used to do the over the phone, so I used to, when I was a ghost writer, I worked for this publishing house in California, and we did a lot of book collections. And so I don't even know how many interviews I did. Honest to God. Sometimes I would do eight in a day and I absolutely was terrible at time management. So they were back to back. Yeah. So I didn't do the debrief. So what I did though, because I sometimes had people working for me also ghosting. This is what I would do and I would do it for myself too. I leave myself coded messages during the interview.

Mike Michalowicz ([38:13](#)):

<Laugh>. Okay.

AJ Harper ([38:14](#)):

So you can, no wait, you can do it. So if you know this is the thing, the person, the per— that they just said that is gold, say, I would say, "That's gold." Or if I finally got the story, you know, they might have told you two other three other things. And now finally they're telling you that you know, all his lost moment or whatever, that's juicy. Say, "Oh, that's the story."

Mike Michalowicz ([38:40](#)):

Just, I love that.

AJ Harper (38:41):

It's affirming, but it's in the transcript. So

Mike Michalowicz (38:44):

Smart.

AJ Harper (38:44):

So if I was working with someone, they'd be like, oh, that's what AJ wants me to pull. Oh, that's what AJ wants me to pull.

Mike Michalowicz (38:50):

So smart. Yeah.

AJ Harper (38:52):

And then at the end I would say <laugh>. So I'm, "I see a natural flow to this story." And I would say at the, in the recording.

Mike Michalowicz (39:02):

Oh, so smart.

AJ Harper (39:03):

Yeah. And I got it down to a science. So you can do that for yourself. If you feel like telling yourself, don't forget this. Yeah. To say loud. Just say something like, that's awesome. Yeah. And then, you know, every time you say that,

Mike Michalowicz (39:15):

That's your

AJ Harper (39:15):

Highlight. That's your highlight. And you just find it in the transcript.

Mike Michalowicz (39:18):

<Laugh>. And you're affirming the interviewee.

AJ Harper (39:19):

Listen, a thousand interviews, man.

Mike Michalowicz (39:22):

Well let's wrap up on one final thousandth interview, which was with Jorge and Jose. We interviewed them through three books for maybe four books. They, they read *The Toilet Paper Entrepreneur*, they came up to a conference. I met these guys and they've been in multiple books. (Multiple books.) What I love about that is you talk about callbacks can authors, if you're writing a book series or books that work in conjunction, is it prudent to do callbacks like that across books?

AJ Harper ([39:51](#)):

I love it if you've got fans and people who read all what you do, who read all your books. It's like when you read a fiction series and a minor character becomes a major character, or a major character shows up as a walk-on in the story. And it's like an Easter Egg. You know, people love Jorge and Jose. Yeah. Because they were updates.

Mike Michalowicz ([40:13](#)):

Yeah.

AJ Harper ([40:14](#)):

Most of the time. Yeah. And I will say with Jorge and Jose, the point was, and this is true for everybody listening, you have to chase down the story. So if you start to hear them telling you a story, finally instead of dancing around it, that's when you, what I mean by chase it down, get going for the details. If you think, okay, oh this is, this is the moment, then you have to say, "Well, tell me more about that. Well, what were you thinking? Well, what did they say? And then what happened? And what were you doing that day?" And you know, you have to give the details so you can then construct a juicy story because people are not natural storytellers. (That's right.) So they forget and you're unlocking it. Your job as an interview is to unlock it for them.

Mike Michalowicz ([41:02](#)):

Beautiful. I think it couldn't say be said any better than that. AJ, let's start wrapping things up here for our guests. I, I want to remind you, because I don't say it enough, get that book, *Write a Must-Read* by AJ Harper. And you do have a course, the Top Three Workshop.

AJ Harper ([41:19](#)):

Top Three Book Workshop.

Mike Michalowicz ([41:20](#)):

Top three book workshop. You're only doing it once a year now. You used to do it twice a year. Yeah. I think you cut down.

AJ Harper ([41:24](#)):

I know. I'm the, I'm the opposite of what most people do. No,

Mike Michalowicz ([41:28](#)):

But it's great. So people are struggling to get in your event because they, it fills up, it fills up quickly. So I invite anyone that's interested to check it out, what's the best website for them to go to? AJ harper.com. There you go. Get the book. Go to our workshop. It will be transformative. Also, some people ask me why am I doing this? And in part is we do have an agency Penned with Purpose and we actually had someone come on board through this podcast. So if you want to check it out, it's penned with purpose.com. Thanks for listening in today. I hope you learned some insights. I want to invite you to go to our website to get all the free materials. You can sign for our email list too, so you don't miss a single episode. It's dwtb podcast.com. We'd love to hear your thoughts, your stories, your experiences. We also want to know what's going on in your life, so you can email us if you prefer it. Hello@Dwbpodcast.Com.

We would love to share or answer some of your questions on our show. Thanks for joining us today. Make sure you join us next week. And as Ave Reminder, don't write that book. Write this one.